

Centers, Corridors and Wedges – Advisory Group Meeting #5 – February 10, 2009

Summary Minutes

I. Welcome and Introductions

Laura Harmon with Planning opened the meeting at 6:08pm. She welcomed participants, and Advisory Group members, City staff, and Planning Commissioners in attendance introduced themselves.

II. Presentation/ Advisory Group Discussion

A. Process Update

Staff provided an update on the Advisory Group Process and called out the addition of a 7th meeting that would serve as a wrap-up session to review all changes to the CCW document.

B. Status Report

Staff also provided a status report on work that has taken place since as a result of the comments received by the Advisory Group.

The general work is as follows:

- Re-establish web survey – *complete, including neighborhood leader e-mail blast*
Question: Where did staff get e-mail information for neighborhood leaders?
Response: *The Planning Department maintains a database for those Neighborhood Organization leaders that register with us. Staff asked that those who are registered but did not receive the e-mail blast to provide Bryman Suttle (bsuttle@ci.charlotte.nc.us) with updated information.*
- At end of Advisory Process, determine additional input needed – *future*
- Develop a glossary for document – *underway*
- Revise wording for Vision – *underway*
- Advisory Group to provide suggested language for Vision – *complete*
- Revise wording of Guiding Principles and provide explanatory text for each Principle - *underway*

The work on Centers is as follows:

- Update CCW and GDP's to address similarities and differences between "centers" in each document – *underway*
- Revise text to indicate that mixed use and multi-use represent the desired character of Mixed Use Centers and Center City, not the prevalent building type – *underway*
- Revise text to strengthen this concept that the Center City is the heart of the City and Region – *underway*
- Revise text for Mixed Use Centers to make types of office (national/regional) more similar to Center City - *underway*

- Clarify park recommendations for Centers - *underway*

The work on Corridors is as follows:

- Redefine Corridors to reflect positive characteristics - *for discussion tonight*
- Add fourth subarea, Established Neighborhoods, to Corridors – *for discussion tonight*
- Revise document to indicate Corridor Station Areas function as “Centers” around a rapid transit station - *for discussion tonight*
- Revise document to indicate Corridors can have areas with character of Mixed-Use Centers and smaller centers may be located in Wedges and Corridors – *Corridors for discussion tonight; Wedges underway*

The work on all area types are as follows:

- Address areas with unique or historic qualities in design section of each area type - *underway*
Question: Where will this be addressed?
Response: In all three (3) sections – Centers, Corridors and Wedges.
- Revise document to refer to mixed use and multi-use in Centers, Corridors and Wedges, where appropriate – *underway*
- Develop summary of framework that highlights major common elements and differences between Centers, Corridors and Wedges - *underway*

C. Additional Recommendations

Staff made some additional recommended changes to the CCW document based on what has been learned through this process:

- Agreement was reached for staff to develop an Executive Summary of the CCW document to be attached and placed at the front of document.
Comment: Fear that this will be the only section read.
Response: Staff will include a statement emphasizing this section is only a summary and to read the rest of document in order to get the full intent.
- Agreement was reached to replace existing maps in document with more general maps such as “bubble” diagrams. Staff will continue to use parcel based maps for tracking development goals and designation will continue to be used for rezoning.
Question: I like it, but can we be sure that these (designations) will not come up in additional meetings?
Response: This will provide a better understanding of where the decisions come from, but the decisions will be based on Area Plans and not CCW.
Question: Can we see examples of the bubble diagram?
Responser: Yes
- Agreement was reached to remove “numbers” from the body of document and place them in the glossary. For example, “low density (up to 4 units per acre)” would be revised in to document to “low density” and a glossary definition would be added to say “low density residential: housing at a density typically at 4 units per acre or less.”
Comment: This will make the document less wordy.

- The Advisory Group generally agreed to continue use of terms – Center, Corridor and Wedge. Staff explained this they did not find acceptable replacement terms and that planners and people in our peer Cities are familiar with these terms. Moreover, staff will be using “Activity Centers” and “Growth Corridors” to differentiate from other Centers and Corridors.
Comment: I agree so long as we find a better way to describe Corridors.

D. Revisions to Corridors

Staff presented the updated Corridors text, including the text recommendations for the newly created Established Neighborhood Sub-Area of Corridors. Staff agreed with the feedback that the initial Corridor portion of the document read in a negative light, specifically that they were described as if they were merely transportation corridors. The updated Corridors text was designed to address this concern. Staff asked for feedback and questions before the group divided into two break-out sessions.

On Corridors text:

Comment: Suggested the use of the word “connectors” versus “corridors.”

Response: “Corridors” has become a generally accepted planning term. The better option will be to describe what we mean by Corridors. It’s better to not focus on the term, but rather the definition.

Comment: Put the term Corridors in the glossary.

Response: Staff committed to doing this.

Comment: Corridor pictures in document have too many vehicles and too few cars in them.

Response: Staff will revise pictures to be more balanced.

Comment: Corridor text is improved but still need to make sure that Corridors do not divide land uses, but instead link them together:

Response: Staff will further update text to address this concern.

Question: How is the ½ mile buffer for a transit station area defined - “as a crow would fly?”

Response: It is established by walking distance, so it would be a smaller area.

Summary of Comments on updated Corridor Text: The group supported the updated text for Corridors, with the revisions noted above.

On Established Neighborhoods text:

Land Use:

Question: When we are talking about density, are we talking about height?

Response: We are talking about units per acre and it will be defined in the glossary. Height is addressed in the design section.

Question: What do we mean by non-local streets?

Response: We mean thoroughfares and this term will be added to the glossary.

Comment: Concerned that the GDP will give points for higher density in Corridors.

Response: We will always look at the context of an area, but we would be using the GDP matrix. Plus, the area plans would trump the GDP and specify density if the area plans provides specific density recommendations.

Transportation:

Question: Does the language imply new transportation networks or enhancements to existing ones?

Response: Enhancements to the existing network.

Environmental and Site Design:

Question: What would trees qualify as in terms of buffering or screening?

Response: Could be screening or part of a buffer. Typically, buffers are defined in terms of width and screening in terms of height and narrowness. These terms will be added into the glossary.

Comment: The text needs to better address the transition between established neighborhoods and surrounding development.

Response: Staff will continue to work on this element.

Comment: Suggest height plane language found in the TOD zoning district, when describing the transition from established neighborhoods to higher density development.

Response: How that transition occurs will be determined through the planning, rezoning and/or permitting process.

Summary of Comments on new Established Neighborhood subarea of Corridors: The group supported the new Established Neighborhoods text, with the revisions noted above.

III. Break-Out Group Discussion and Report Back

The purpose of the break-out sessions was for the Advisory Group to provide feedback as to whether or not the recommended text changes on Corridors adequately addressed the concerns submitted by group members and the general public prior to this meeting. Staff split the comments into two groups: A) Comments that staff believes have been addressed and B) Additional comments. These are listed below.

A. Comments staff believes are addressed by updated corridors text are as follows:

1. Corridors allow anything to be included in them
2. Yes, corridors seem to allow anything. Maybe we just need to add "where appropriate" when the document lists the uses allowed in corridors
3. Plan seems transportation driven
4. Will transportation and economic decisions trump livability?
5. Established neighborhoods within walking distance of a transit station should be protected; established neighborhoods within Interchange Areas and General Corridor Areas should also be protected
6. Concern about residential neighborhoods located in Corridors – areas shown as Corridors are too large; will threaten neighborhoods located in Corridors; should provide pedestrian facilities to accommodate today's needs before proposing more density
7. Based on description of subareas in Corridors, could see existing single family neighborhoods fitting into any subarea
8. Need to see how neighborhoods in Corridors will be classified

9. Concerned that neighborhoods in a Corridor would be destroyed by upgrades to street network to meet standards
10. On page 18 under Transit Station Areas, document indicates "a minimum density of residential uses should be 15 dwelling units per acre" –delete this or consider providing established neighborhoods with protection
11. Neighborhoods in Corridors feel threatened by designation
12. The one land use that the document seems to indicate that is not appropriate in the corridors is low density residential

B. The following are some additional comments brought up for discussion:

1. Why is the framework a "wagon wheel?" Why are Centers not connected by Corridors
2. Lacks a Corridor "looping around" Charlotte –to connect spokes
3. Need to identify Corridor subareas
4. Why aren't Albemarle and Providence Road listed as Corridors?
5. The document doesn't seem to provide a good explanation of the difference between growth corridors and other corridors like Wendover and Providence
6. We may need to address these and what the vision is for them
7. Recognizing importance of public transit and pedestrian activities/urban parks is important in achieving responsible growth
8. Dense development in one area of a Corridor may adversely affect traffic in another area planned for pedestrian activity
9. No discussion of the traditional use of Corridors for moving vehicular traffic –will there be an attempt to maintain them at existing widths and intensities?
10. Explain what an "Interchange Area" is
11. Define "Bicycle facilities". And, however they are defined in this document, who pays for them?
12. On page 17 -top right bullet & bottom of the page): a dense network of streets does not work for all land uses & such a requirement is not necessary regardless
13. (On Page 19): 400 foot block lengths are too short
14. (On Page 19 - bottom of the Transportation Column): "...new streets needed to create the desired network."Where does the land come from to create these new streets?
15. (On Page 18): it restricts multi-family to <22du anywhere outside Hwy 4 –even freeway off ramps. Won't this hurt the community's renewed efforts to provide affordable housing throughout the city?
16. Pages 21 and 22 focus heavily on "sustainable building and site design". However, requirements of shorter block lengths (400 ft.), bike facilities, pedestrian facilities, and over-all density is to contradictory the goal of environmental sustainability (i.e. increased storm water, etc.).
17. Independence Hwy construction is destroying that part of town

C. Group 1: A summary of Group 1's discussion follows below:

Comment: Addressing comment A1 is still a work in progress.

Comment: Corridor text is still transportation driven; too much emphasis on multi-modal transportation; even the images on page 15 are all transportation oriented.

Comment: Enhancing transportation network and allowing higher intensity uses in corridors will drive transportation volume up on those thoroughfares and consequently on adjacent local street network.

Comment: Text changes do start to address protection of existing established neighborhoods

Comment: Soften the term Corridor in the text.

Comment: See Corridor as a line which divides rather than unites.

Comment: More definition of what the transition options would be between established neighborhoods and the uses along thoroughfare.

Comment: Add transition to the glossary.

Comment: Hub and spoke approach does not adequately protect established neighborhood because increased traffic volume may require widening

Comment: Charlotte is still too developer driven.

Comment: Think outside of the box; want uniqueness; referenced Paris, France.

Comment: Address additional comments B8 and B9.

D. Group 2

Comment: Where did these comments come from, haven't some of them been addressed already in the document? (*Response: Staff believes comments in group A have been addressed.*)

Comment: On A12 the issue of density is not addressed, as you get out of downtown there are areas of low density, and not everyone is going to want to live in apartments.

Comment: What's going to be the new zoning in transit station areas along the North Corridor, and by the time they are rezoned according to the recommendations of CC&W will it still have an impact, especially if development happens before? (*Response: Zoning does not have to wait until construction of the line.*)

Comment: How has it been decided that comments A1-12 were addressed? (*Response: This was staff's assessment.*)

Comment: Will this document recommend corrective rezonings? (*Response: No.*)

Comment: When streets are widened and especially when bike facilities are added, who pays for them? (*Response: In most circumstances streets are added or widened as development happens, sometimes the public sector pays for them as well.*)

Comment: One group (meaning people in more densely built areas as opposed to lower density areas) should not be burdened over another in who pays for certain improvements.

Comment: Where did the 400 foot block length recommendation come from? (*Response: City Council adopted policy.*)

Comment: How will new streets be proposed in new transit station areas? (*Response: Through plans and the development process.*)

Comment: How will you improve the environment when you are increasing density? (*Response: It will be improved by sustainable building practices and good site design.*)

Comment: Is there a plan for Independence Boulevard and is there a plan to help prevent other Corridors become like Independence? (*Response: A revitalization plan for Independence Blvd. is underway.*)

Following the break-out exercise, staff brought both groups back together to report on the results of their independent discussions.

IV. Discuss Assignment for Next Meeting

- Staff reminded the group that the next Advisory Group meeting on Tuesday, March 3 would be back in Room 280.
- Staff agreed to e-mail the vision and guiding principles revisions to the Advisory Group in advance of the next meeting.
- Staff noted that comments received so far regarding Wedges were located on the back of the agenda and asked that members e-mail additional comments on Wedges to Linda Keich at lkeich@ci.charlotte.nc.us by the end of the work day on Friday, February 27.

V. Adjourn